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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 001910

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS

1. Summary: The major Taipei dailies over the weekend provided a great deal of coverage on the upcoming China trips by KMT Chairman Lien Chan and PFP Chairman James Soong, with two new angles: President Chen Shui-bian's change of attitude about the visits, and the role of the United States with regard to Chen's change in attitude. For April 24, the front-page news story for the centrist "China Times," the pro-unification "United Daily News," and the pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" -- and a page-two news story in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" -- all carried Chen's remarks of the previous day in which he said he would give his blessings to the opposition leaders because their upcoming China visits may serve as a probe for future cross-strait relations. A "United Daily News" news story on page two April 24 quoted the KMT as saying that Chen's change of attitude is a result of the influence of Taiwan public opinion and the United States' open support for the opposition-party leaders' visits to China. Taiwan's biggest daily, the pro-independence "Liberty Times," ran a banner headline on page two April 25 emphasizing that "Lien mentioned that [Lien's and Soong's trips] are a probe, but Chen never said he wants Lien and Soong to pave the way for [his trip to China.]" A page-four news story of Monday's (4/25) "United Daily News" quoted a Pan-Blue source saying the United States conveyed its hope to Chen via AIT Director Douglas Paal and Taiwan's National Security Deputy Secretary-General Ke Cheng-heng that he will support Lien's visit to China, or Washington will not rule out the possibility of criticizing Chen in public. A separate news story on the same page of the "United Daily News" cited DPP Secretary-General Su Chen-chang as saying that Chen's blessings for Lien and Soong were definitely not the result of U.S. manipulation.

2. Professor Chu Yun-han of the National Taiwan University commented in the centrist "China Times" on the United States' role in cross-strait relations by saying that the biggest obstruction for cross-strait reconciliation will come from neo-conservatives inside the Bush administration, who believe that the United States must do all it can to thwart the rising of China. A "United Daily News" news analysis said the critical fear that Chen's power might be taken away has finally been eliminated since Soong will visit China with the ten-point consensus he reached with President Chen Shui-bian, and Lien said he is willing to report to Chen about his trip prior to his departure. A limited-circulation, pro-independence English-language "Taipei Times" editorial said the attitudes of the Taiwan and U.S. governments are too tolerant of Lien and Soong, while a limited-circulation, pro-unification English-language "China Post" editorial said it is possible that Lien's and Soong's trips to China will lead to an eventual meeting between Chen Shui-bian and Chinese President Hu Jintao. End summary.

A) "The Energy and Positive Foundation for Peace across the Taiwan Strait"

Chu Yun-han, professor of political science professor at the National Taiwan University, commented in the "Weekly Review" column in the centrist, pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 600,000] (4/25):

"Beginning this week, [KMT Chairman] Lien Chan and [PFP Chairman] James Soong will separately begin their first-ever trips to mainland China. The ice-breaking trips will not only offer Lien and Soong an opportunity to climb up a lofty political mountain range that no one has ever attempted to [climb] over more than five decades of cross-strait confrontations, but will also create a chance which may lead to a whole new page for cross-strait relations. .

"The United States, via a delicate manipulation of diplomatic and military policies, has persistently tried to make sure that the development of cross-strait relations as well as political developments inside Taiwan would meet Washington's strategic interests in

East Asia. In the meantime, the fact that the political discussions inside Taiwan tend to uphold the de jure independence [of Taiwan] as an ultimate and non-transferable option, and that the discourse on Taiwan's entity, which tends to define the nature of cross-Strait relations as a zero-sum game, have constantly gained an upper hand in all debates has deprived many local political elites of political imagination. These political elites no longer know how to make use of the tremendous transitional energy inherent in a [possible] political reconciliation across the Taiwan Strait or how to proactively convert such hidden energy into substantive politics and a positive economic foundation that will benefit Taiwan's existence and development. Up to the eve of Taiwan's Legislative Yuan elections at the end of last year, leaders in Beijing focused their thoughts and energies in how to prevent de jure Taiwan independence; they have never really planned or worked out a blueprint about how to lead both sides of the Taiwan Strait to move toward comprehensive political reconciliation.

"All the elements that have hindered and oppressed the release of the energy of a cross-Strait political reconciliation continue to exist, and it's unlikely they will fade away in a short period of time. The road to political reconciliation across the Taiwan Strait is of course full of turns and twists. The biggest obstruction will definitely come from the neo-conservatism inside the Bush administration, who believe that the United States must do all it can to bar the rising of China. For them, the Taiwan issue is like a heavy historical burden tied to China's back, which can considerably consume China's energy and resources, restrain the flexibility of China's military strategy, and evidently undermine Beijing's ability and justification to play a leading role in constructing security and order in East Asia. If both sides of the Taiwan Strait move toward comprehensive reconciliation, it will mean that China has finally lay down a heavy strategic burden. As a result, the strategic situation in East Asia will move toward a direction that is favorable for China's peaceful rising, and Japan will hesitate all the more about the strategic option of whether it should join hands with the United States in containing China. In the end, such a development will lead to an overall decline of the United States' leading role in East Asia. But the enormous transitional energy hidden in the reconciliation across the Taiwan Strait also gave some Taiwan political figures who have historical imagination an opportunity to seek from the Beijing leaders substantial political concessions and economic development benefits [for Taiwan]. In fact, given the condition that the power driving nationalistic movements inside Taiwan is declining and Taiwan's economics is increasingly leaning toward mainland China, policy makers in the United States have begun to worry that Taiwan, following Seoul, will be the next chess on the strategic chessboard of East Asia whose position will likely sway. Accordingly, the United States did not hesitate to give up its most valuable achievement during the World War II, which was gained at the expense of numerous lives: Japan's constitution of peace. The United States wants to tightly grip its only reliable strategic partner in East Asia - Japan - by revising the U.S.-Japan security pact and ostensibly supporting Japan's bid to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. ."

B) "Lien to Report to Bian, and Bian's Crisis of His Power Being Taken Away Will Be Removed"

Journalist Luo Hsiao-he said in a news analysis in the pro-unification "United Daily News" (4/24):

"The China visits by [KMT Chairman] Lien Chan and [PFP Chairman] James Soong in succession have dealt a serious blow to the prestige of the ruling DPP government. But following the moves that Soong will visit China bringing his ten-point consensus with President Chen Shui-bian, and Lien is willing to report to Chen about his trip [prior to his departure], the crisis that Chen's power might be taken away has finally been eliminated. Chen, following the suit of the United States, is now happy to support Lien and in the meantime is trying to keep some room for the upcoming meeting between Lien and [Chinese President] Hu Jintao. .

"The whole situation changed subtly following Beijing's announcement that it was extending an invitation to Soong. Beijing's two-handed strategy has created a free-flowing and feasible approach for a [potential] Chen-Hu meeting in the future and has offered Chen an opportunity to 'get involved' in the heat of Lien's and

Soong's China visits. No matter whether [or not] Beijing did it because it took into consideration Washington's push for official talks across the Taiwan Strait, the move has effectively removed the crisis of Chen being marginalized. ."

C) "Be Less Tolerant of Lien and Soong"

The pro-independence English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (4/24):

". On Tuesday, Randall Schriver, the US deputy assistant secretary of state in charge of China and Taiwan issues told reporters that 'the leaders in Beijing will ultimately have to talk to the elected leaders in Taiwan and the government that is in power.'

"If Beijing is only willing to speak with opposition leaders such as Lien and People First Party (PFP) Chairman James Soong, the already complicated cross-strait relationship will only become more complicated. So, although Schriver did not criticize Lien and Soong, it isn't hard to detect some degree of skepticism. The KMT is obviously aware of this. .

"At the same time, the Presidential Office has indicated that it is treating the visits by Lien and Soong as purely private in nature and without any official status. From that standpoint, the Presidential Office has indicated support for Lien and Soong's trips. The government's change in posture obviously had much to do with the promises conveyed by Lien and Soong -either through the US or other channels - to not overstep their bounds.

"The attitude of the Taiwan and US governments can be interpreted as follows: If you must go, then so long as you do not do anything illegal, we'll give you the benefit of the doubt. However, that attitude is way too tolerant of Lien and Soong. .

". Lien and Soong are also leaders of political parties. Voters have cast ballots for their parties in freely-held elections, and in that sense they are politically accountable to the people of Taiwan. Their trips have helped ease international pressure on China for its enactment of the 'Anti-Secession' Law and diverted the Taiwanese public's attention. For that, they don't deserve the benefit of the doubt from anyone."

D) "Lien Chan's 'Journey of Peace'"

The conservative, pro-unification English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] noted in an editorial (4/23):

". Although it is not yet certain as to what Lien Chan will bring home after the eight-day, four-city 'tour of peace,' one thing seems sure, however. Cross-strait tensions will ease as a result. Exchanges in the fields of culture, tourism, economy will improve. The long-awaited 'san tong' (direct trade, transport, and other links) will get greater momentum. Even political dialogue between Beijing and Taipei is no longer impossible. .

"What may leave the 'pan green' camp of separatists sitting resentfully on the sidelines is Washington's open support for Lien Chan's ice-breaking visit to China. A spokesman for the State Department said this week it is a 'positive step' for Taiwan's individuals to visit China. The United States welcomes any move that will help reduce cross-strait tensions and enhance mutual understanding, the spokesman said.

"Will these steps lead to an eventual meeting between Chen Shui-bian and Hu Jintao? Nobody knows. But the United States would welcome such an eventuality. A Hu-Chen handshake? Is this too far-fetched? But in realpolitik, nothing is impossible."

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